
Unit 4: Victorian Britain

Unit Overview

The first half of the 19th century witnessed enormous social change in Europe when the foundations of the industrial economy were laid. Railways crisscrossed the continent, new consumer goods appeared, family patterns changed as did the social and economic expectations of women. The Industrial Revolution created two new social classes: a wealthy, powerful bourgeoisie and a new urban working class. The crowding of cities presented new social and political problems. The desire to create a more equitable social order was embodied by movements such as the Chartist movement, trade unionism, Utopian socialism and communism.

In England, the Industrial Revolution provided the impetus for reform. Until 1830, England was governed by the Tory (Conservative) Party, which generally stood for the aristocratic quality of English life.

Lecture 4.1: The Victorian Britain

Objectives:

- The student will understand the major events of Britain during the Victorian era.
- The student will be introduced to Prime Ministers through primary sources.

Topics:

- A timeline of major events.
- Prime Ministers of the Victorian Era.

Content Background:

Victoria (1837-1901) succeeded her uncle in 1837. Her reign would dominate the rest of the century and she would be the longest reigning British monarch.

Lecture Support:

1837: The foundation of the Chartist Movement.

1845-50: The Irish Famine.

1846: Repeal of the Corn Laws.

1848-1875: Public Health Acts.

1850: Factory Act and industrial growth.

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1851: The Great Exhibition.

1854-1856: The Crimean War.

1867: The Second Reform Act.

1870: The Education Act.

1884: The Third Reform Act

1899-1902: The Boer War

Lecture 4.2: British Foreign Policy 1815-1865

Objective:

- The student will understand the rationale behind foreign policy during the Victorian Era.

Topics:

- Key elements of Foreign Policy in Britain between 1815 and 1865.

Lecture Support:

Britain's foreign policy was dominated by the Royal Navy. Her power and prestige was strongest in areas that the navy could reach. The most important aims in foreign policy were

- a determination to keep the peace in Europe
- to pursue policies to help trade

Diplomacy

Britain's political system was the only one which remained intact in 1815 and Britain wanted to enhance her European status. She was seen as a principle agent in the final defeat of France; military aid was supplied by the Royal Navy, gold and supplies were given to her allies and Britain was also a major force in the establishment and maintenance of four coalitions. The French Wars (Napoleonic Wars) had cost Britain 600 million pounds and trade had suffered greatly. After 1830, Britain needed secure access to raw materials and markets for finished goods. Diplomacy was the weapon of choice.

Balance of Power in Europe

There was a great desire to prevent the domination of Europe by any one Power as Napoleon had done. Britain encouraged the spread of constitutionalism providing advice and even military aid to countries attempting to become more democratic. It was thought that constitutional governments would have similar outlooks and ideas and would be easier with which to establish favorable trade relations, provide allies and balance the autocratic systems which had been returned to power in 1815.

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Containment of France

France was seen as the most dangerous nation in Europe. Britain's single-minded desire to prevent the rise of France prevented Palmerston from recognizing the threat posed by the rise of Prussia under Bismarck.

Colonial Expansion

The industrial revolution increased the demand for raw materials and markets for finished products. Britain's colonial policy included: Physical acquisition of territory and diplomatic influence of areas in an effort to influence trade.

Lecture 4.3: The Industrial Revolution

Objectives:

- The student will begin to understand the importance of the agricultural revolution in the coming of the industrial revolution.
- The student will be able to identify elements of the industrial revolution.

Topics:

- The Agricultural Revolution (new crops, new techniques).
- The reasons the Industrial Revolution began in England.

Lecture Support:

What was the Industrial Revolution?

It may be defined as the application of power-driven machinery to manufacturing. The typical characteristics of the Industrial Revolution in Europe include:

1. The increasing application of science to industry.
2. The organization of work on the factory system which increased division of labour and specialization of tasks.
3. Rapid urbanization of the population.
4. The use of new basic materials such as iron and steel.
5. The use of new energy sources such as coal, the steam engine and the internal combustion engine.
6. Important developments in transportation and communication such as the steam locomotive, steamship, telegraph and radio.
7. Massive increases in production.